

Strategies of Language Revitalization in Alignment with Native Pedagogical Forms: Examples from Ahtna Alaska

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Swarthmore College 2004

Language and the sacred are indivisible. The earth and all its appearances and expressions exist in names and stories and prayers and spells.

-N. Scott Momaday (1995) "Sacred Places" in *Aboriginal Voices* 2 (1):29

0.0 Introduction

Michael Krauss, director of the Alaska Native Languages Center (ANLC) for thirty years, has compiled data to predict that 90% of the world's 6,000- 7,000 languages will be moribund or dead in next 100 years (Krauss, 1992; 7).^{*} This erosion of global cultural diversity is occurring through the spread of closed or restricted political, economic, and religious institutions which reward homogenization and subtractive cultural assimilation.¹ This model of integration does not allow for the full participation of multiple cultures in one society but rather requires the complete eradication of non-majority cultures. Using language shift as a measure, it is clear that current rates of cultural assimilation far outstrip any seen before in human history.

In Alaska, groups and individuals are working against this trend, but until recently programs have been few. In the bilingual education programs that do exist, English speaking Native Alaskan children often learn kinship terms, color names, and seasonal

^{*} First I would like to thank all the people in Alaska who welcomed me and helped me develop these ideas, especially Siri Tuttle. Also, I thank my professors and readers at Swarthmore College for all they've taught me, David Harrison and Ted Fernald. Finally, for all their support, encouragement, and years of debating such topics, Timothy Colman, Steve Holt, Elena Cuffari, Milena Velis, Wolfgang Rougle, and Elizabeth Koerber for the computer during desperate times.

¹ I have taken the term 'subtractive' from Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000. Its use refers to acculturation processes which 'subtract' previously held languages, identities, affiliations etc.

divisions in reference to the way these terms are defined in English. Granted, as Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1995;101) point out for Tlingits, English speaking Native Americans do not talk and think like whites. Still, even if a language cannot retain a completely steady and constant cultural significance, it is clear that language programs should not teach English-in-code, and should not reinforce institutionalized European-American values in their educational models and priorities.

In this thesis, I will explore creative ways that endangered language speech communities in Southeastern Interior Alaska have brought second-language acquisition into alignment with native pedagogical forms and cultural values, thereby strengthening both the language and the community, and further developing the power of the language and other cultural processes to respond to new situations and expand their functional domains. I will study the writings and teachings of both local community leaders and others working with Native language programming, documentation, and theorizing, in order to establish several themes which are integral to Native views of language, speech situations, and education. Oriented in light of the specifics of Athabaskan Alaska, these themes must be considered carefully when strategizing for language transmission in the absence of an immersive home environment, in programs such as mentoring, immersion schooling, supplemental education in public schools, and summer culture camps.

I will demonstrate how analysis of stories, geography, Native writings, theoretical works, cultural studies and other domains of knowledge often clearly indicate the priorities of a speech community, and may be examined for both explicit and implicit lessons. Close attention to these lessons will help make a language program successful. Not only will this attentiveness prevent well-intentioned community members and

outsiders from adding to the problem of unintentional subtractive enculturation, but will actually fortify the cultural processes which are used creatively and adaptively in this new situation.

1.0 Why Ahtna?

This study will be centered on the Ahtna communities of Southeastern Interior Alaska, and other closely related cultural groups. My own experience working with the Ahtna language and traveling among these villages allows me to provide reference to activity among these people when examining larger theories or histories.

1.1 Status of Ahtna Language

The Ahtna population in Alaska is estimated to be between 173 individuals (US Census, 1990) and 500 (ANLC, 2001). While these data are most definitely inaccurate due to US census ignorance of strict rules governing the counting of kin in Ahtna culture, it is clear that there has been a decline in both total population of ethnically Ahtna people and number of speakers of Ahtna over the past 30 years.² The Field Committee for Development and Planning in Alaska (cited in de Laguna, McClellan, 1981; 644) estimated Ahtna population at around 500 individuals in 1968. In 1979, there were perhaps 200 speakers of Ahtna (Krauss, Golla, 1981; 77), but currently this number is probably close to 80 (ANLC, 2001).

² As members of the Chickaloon Village Council tell it, one only counts one's relatives before going to war. When the census collectors came through Chickaloon, they asked the chief of the village how many Ahtna lived there. When he didn't reply, they counted the persons sitting in his living room (9), recorded that number and left.

In his work on Indian Language Retention, James Bauman (1980) defines five terms to describe the stages of a language moving toward extinction, and he directly correlates each stage to a program that should be undertaken in the interest of that language's continued use. Ahtna clearly falls into his categorization as obsolescent: that is, a language no longer learned as a first language, spoken only by an aging population, and whose few speakers are rapidly shifting or have lost all domains in which the language would be regularly used (Bauman, 1980; 10). This is the case for nearly all Native Alaskan languages (Krauss, 1980; 33-51).

For obsolescent languages, Bauman suggests a program of restoration, and warns that this may require much energy and expense. Of course, the specific actions required must be considered on case by case basis, and must take into account whether a language has declined rapidly or gradually, and why (Nettle, Romaine, 2000; 51). Ahtna communities have shifted to English with increasing speed over the last 100 years, but are now responding to their situation in diverse ways.

Despite the small numbers and rapid decline of speakers among the Ahtna, individuals and communities are employing several methods to fight language shift, and even revitalize use of Ahtna language in education and social life. Many of the leaders of these programs overlap, so that the experience and methods learned in one are quickly shared with and applied to another. The diversity of these efforts will hopefully allow the language to retain a somewhat broad and multi-faceted role in community life. Although learners often hear the same set of culturally marked words, such as words for local macro fauna, perhaps they will see a range of settings for these terms-- in school, in stories, at a meal.

Clearly, over the past few generations, many individuals have chosen dominant language monolingualism as a strategy to give children to gain the most advantageous position in a rapidly changing world. The continued advancement of highways, television, and radio as villages became connected to the road systems in the 1950s meant rapid growth of exposure to and dependence on non-localized systems of production, technology, and culture. In areas where access to construction, military, religious, and other jobs largely depended on English language ability, communities developed ambiguous and contradictory attitudes concerning the use of their native language. Learning a language, even for children, requires attention and persistence, and a child will not develop their skills if not clearly supported. This explains how many adults, even if their parents frequently spoke the Native language, were less ambivalent about English use than Ahtna language use and consequently grew up mostly monolingual in the language of higher prestige (Dauenhauer, Dauenhauer, 1998; 67).

1.2 Extant Programs

Luckily, many communities are, as per the paradigm of Joshua Fishman (1991), engaging in ideological clarification. The Ya Ne Dah Ah School has been running an immersion-based program in Chickaloon for more than ten years and serves the majority of local children, solidly affirming the value of Ahtna language (Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, 2002). Following Chickaloon's success, another school opened in Tazlina this fall with five students, and there is interest in Chistochina which may develop into reality in the next few years.

Immersion schools are powerful in that they directly challenge the control which outside forces often exercise over the education and socialization of a community's children. Bringing schooling back into the hands of the community allows for the involvement of elders, local decisions about the curriculum, and positive role models for children. This environment often leads to the students' strong performance in all subjects, as well beginning the process of immersing them in the fundamentals of a language.

A few individuals are also working to learn the language using the mentoring model pioneered by the Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival (AICLS) (Hinton, et al. 2002; ix). In this model, an apprentice and mentor do work together speaking only the target language. This method emphasizes an interactive, non-literate, no-cost approach to language acquisition, which is especially appropriate considering the resources available.

At various times throughout the summer, language learning also takes place at weekend culture camps, work days, and social gatherings. In addition, workshops led by elders and linguists from the ANLC provide intermittent adult education in Native language literacy, strategies for learning languages and taking action, and basic linguistic theory. Perhaps more importantly, the ANLC can also help train committed community members for collaborative linguistic research and analysis.

With all of this activity, the Ahtna people are in a good position to examine successes and failures, and learn from those mistakes. It is extremely unlikely that the language as it traditionally existed will be restored to its former functions. However, it is possible that Ahtna communities will be able to continue to improve the position of their language, even as it develops a radically new role and meaning in their lives.

2.0 Alaska History

Native languages in Alaska, as elsewhere, have historically been explicitly and vigorously repressed by religious, government, and educational institutions. In order to provide a working framework of this history, I will briefly trace the some of the influences on Native cultural processes in Alaska starting in the late 19th century. All cultures exist in a continual state of dynamic realignment, but because of the particularly invasive actions of European American society and the responses of Native peoples, indigenous processes in Alaska have been, in many ways, dramatically altered or replaced altogether. The history presented here is by no means exhaustive, and I have tried to focus less on the goals and motivations of whites and more on the forces working in Native communities.

2.1 Federal Policy and Boarding Schools

Across the United States in the 19th century, policy concerning Native Americans was directed towards either assimilation or extermination. By 1868, a year after the United States acquired Russia's American colonies, the federal government adopted a 'peace policy,' as, in the words of then commissioner of Indian affairs Nathaniel Taylor, "it costs less to civilize than to kill" (Spack, 2002; 17). Believing language and cultural difference to be the root of much violent conflict, the Peace Commission explicitly worked to "blot out" Native languages (Alton, forthcoming; 9).

As a result, in the 1870s, federal boarding schools were established around the United States where students studied far from tribal lands so that they might be

acculturated into Anglo-American society while isolated from the influence of their families and communities. Even when a tribe was not held captive by war or treaty obligations, parents were misled into agreeing to send their children to study in enemy territory. At some schools, parents were unaware that when they “put their mark” on school documents, they were giving the schools “the right to hold children for three years with no vacation” (Spack, 2002; 14). Even parents who distrusted the white authorities sometimes saw benefits to an education in English. According to Luther Standing Bear, his father did not believe the promises of the whites, but Standing Bear went to the school in order to die bravely, as it were, learning the ways of the enemy (1933; 230). As Spack (2002) has convincingly shown, Native parents recognized the value of knowledge of the English language and desired their children to learn “only English [and nothing else]” (2002; 42). However, these schools were clearly designed as part of a severely anti-Native and pro-European acculturation program that was particularly harmful and counter to the wishes and goals of parents.

The boarding school in Carlisle, Pennsylvania is of particular note served because it served as a model for others built in Alaska. The influential missionary Sheldon Jackson based his philosophies on those of Richard Pratt at Carlisle when he established a boarding school in Sitka (Alton, forthcoming; 12). English was the only language permitted at both the schools in Sitka and at the Fort Wrangell schools (Daley, James, 2004; 28), and at the school in Douglas, as at many other schools, speaking an Indian language resulted in corporal punishment (Alton, forthcoming; 16).

2.2 Missionaries

Various missionary groups were instrumental in cultural changes of the late 19th and early 20th century in all areas of Alaska. A few missionary groups, such as the Jesuits and Moravians, integrated documentation of, use of, and production of materials in native languages into their missionary work. They believed that the word of God should be brought to the Native peoples in whatever form they could most easily access. In spite of other ways in which their work attacked and eroded Native culture, the work that was done can be an invaluable resource for those continuing the documentation of languages (Krauss, 1980; 20).

The majority of American missionary groups in Alaska, however, were concerned with more than the simply the most immediate religious education possible. They considered that their calling was to move indigenous people out of their traditional ways of life and exclusively into the so-called civilized world. These outreach efforts actively suppressed Native language use and encouraged or enforced English language monolingualism. English was seen as the only appropriate and possible medium of religious understanding, education, and participation in the broader society of the United States. Through shared funding, employment, and goals missionaries and schools often collaborated. Sheldon Jackson began his work in Alaska as a Presbyterian missionary, but in his later appointment as General Agent for Education in the Alaska Territory, he kept several former missionaries as employees of the federal Bureau of Education (Alton, forthcoming; 15).

2.3 Resistance

By the turn of the century, government documents reported that about half of school-aged Native children were enrolled in government sponsored schools, both boarding and day (Spack, 2002; 110). Although these schools are sometimes blamed for subsequent language shift, one should be careful of overestimating the power of the language instruction which occurred there. Teachers were often incompetent, and students rarely graduated with strong English skills (Spack, 2002; 55). More important than the language programs in the schools was the concurrent discontinuation of a Native educational program at home. Although most Alaska tribes did not experience the forced relocation weakened and destroyed many Native American communities in other parts of the United States, colonization and resource extraction increased. Some saw the loss of land use and fishing rights as an encroachment upon Native autonomy and political rights, and resistance became an urgent necessity. Some students at boarding schools tried to gain the skills needed to engage in effective resistance and utilization of the tools of white society.

For example, although when William Paul graduated from the Sitka Industrial Training School he was considered a model of assimilation, he used his education there and the law degree he later earned to fight for Native rights to continue traditional subsistence fishing practices (Daley, James, 2004; 43). William Paul uses the Tlingit trickster character of Raven to explain the use of speech as a means to greater social power (Daley, James, 2004; 64). Together with the Tlingit organization of the Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB), Paul founded and edited the publication *The Alaska Fisherman*, which became a critical means for mass communication from a Native perspective and voicing dissent (Daley, James, 2004). Similarly, the ANB itself was not

founded to advocate cultural assimilation, despite their intra-tribal organizing in favor of English proficiency. In a time when the Tlingit language was still strong, the critical losses facing the tribe were encroachment on fishing and hunting rights, as well as other civil rights (Dauenhauer, Dauenhauer, 1995; 104). The ANB saw successful use of English to not only be effective in achieving their goals, but also in line with Native views of subversion of the powerful through their own means as embodied by the legendary figure of Raven (Daley, James, 2004; 63). Now that language is a more urgently critical issue, the ANB has adopted a policy working against the erosion of Tlingit and in favor of its expanding use within the organization (Dauenhauer, Dauenhauer, 1995; 104).

Unfortunately, in many tribes, few thought to focus energy on defending their language, which was seen as inalienable and a natural extension of Indian identity. For instance, Luther Standing Bear (1933; 235) wrote that he “did not become so progressive that [he] could not speak the language of [his] father and mother” and George Webb, speaking of his first language Pima, wrote “anyone, once speaking the language, will not ever forget it... it is very gentle and musical” (quoted in Spack, 2002; 128). With a few exceptions, such as Native linguist Francis La Flesche, it wasn’t until language shift was well progressed that organized action occurred.

2.4 1940 – Present

Under the leadership of John Collier during Roosevelt’s New Deal, there was a brief period when federal policy shifted to one of supporting bilingual education and story books and grammars were produced for some tribes in the lower forty eight.

Implementing reforms in the states, Collier clearly intended to reach the then territory of Alaska (Alton, forthcoming; 20). In a brief publication entitled “Handbook for Alaska Field Representatives,” Collier encourages support and respect for all Native American cultures, so they may be “brought into the stream of American culture as a whole” (quoted in Alton, forthcoming; 20). Unfortunately, this top-level ideological shift was not long-lasting enough to seriously affect the practices of those working in the field. By 1945, Collier had resigned, and it wasn’t until the civil rights movements of the 60s that these ideas resurfaced (Alton, forthcoming).

At last in the 60s and 70s, as the losses accompanying the decline of Native language use became more apparent there was a resurgence of interest in and valuing of tradition in many communities in Alaska. During this eventful period, there was a proliferation of linguistics work done in Alaska, culminating in the founding by state legislation of the Alaska Native Languages Center (ANLC) in 1972. The effects of desegregation and bilingual education rulings from the Supreme Court were felt in Native communities (Krauss, 1980; 29). In addition, the passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) was an example of successful activist organizing and suddenly provided a positive economic support for Native identity (Sprott, 1992; 73). However, as ANCSA encourages a corporate business and investment model for administration and problem solving, it has also had profoundly anti-traditional effects. This tendency is also seen in the popularity and proliferation of ‘anti-culture’ churches, such as Pentecostals, in Native areas since the 1970s (Dombrowski, 2001).

Combined external pressures and internal choices made both actively and passively have led to the present situation. Currently, only two of twenty Native

languages in Alaska are spoken as a first language by children (ANLC, 2001).³ Now communities in Alaska are seeking to take advantage of their aging populations of native speakers to put themselves in the best position for the defense and revitalization of these languages in the future. The young adults and parents of these communities are now partial, passive, or non-speakers who cannot transmit the language on their own to their children.

2.5 Ahtna History

Ahtna Athabaskans live in several communities along the Copper River, in Chickaloon, Anchorage, Fairbanks, as well as Seattle and other places. Historically, the Ahtna have never formed a single unified group; each local group was autonomous (de Laguna, McClellan, 1981; 641). In the twentieth century, speech communities fall into four major dialects, Western, Central, Lower, and Mentasta (Upper) (de Laguna, McClellan, 1981; 643). The period of Russian presence in Alaska, from 1741- 1867 (Alton, forthcoming) did not have profound affects on Ahtna culture. Krauss records only 50 Russian loan words in Ahtna, most of which were probably first borrowed by Dena'ina, and from there spread to Ahtna (Krauss, 1980; 17). The Russians were unable to get a foothold in Ahtna territory except briefly with a small trading post which the Ahtna destroyed in 1848 (de Laguna, McClellan, 1981; 643). Of course, trade goods and small pox traveled indirectly from the Cook Inlet into Ahtna territory, but these elements probably did not substantially alter the direction of Ahtna non-material culture and development. Russian missionary work among other groups, such as the Dena'ina,

³ Language divisions and speaker statistics are largely from the research done by Michael Krauss (1974). Languages are divided based on criteria of mutual intelligibility and speakers' impressions of political and cultural similarity or compatibility

Alutiiq, and Aluets, did not reach the Ahtna during this period (de Laguna, McClellan, 1981; 643). By 1930, however, nearly all Ahtnas had been baptized Russian Orthodox, probably from the influence of the neighboring Dena'ina (de Laguna, McClellan, 643). Currently, many Ahtna are Protestant and there is a strong Baptist and missionary presence in the Copper Valley.

The first American exploration in the area, the expedition led by Lieutenant Henry Allen, occurred in 1885. His report includes much geographic and ethnographic information (Allen, 1985). Miners and other settlers moved into the Copper Valley in the early 20th century, and the Glenn Highway was built between 1941 and 1945. The Trans-Alaska pipeline was built through the valley in 1971, bringing many new settlements for workers and their families (Cooper Valley Economic Development Association, Inc., online). The first extensive linguistics work in the area began in 1973 by James Kari (Krauss, 1980; 36), who eventually compiled an extensive dictionary published in 1990 (ANLC, 2001).

3.0 Social Structures

3.1 Parenting

Parenting practices are obviously of utmost importance when considering the causes and effects of language shift. The home is the primary place of unstructured first language acquisition, and the choices of parents have an inestimable influence on the success of any language program. Even in a boarding school, students such as Luther Standing Bear did not become committed to learning English until encouraged by their

parents to do so (Spack, 2002; 102). When designing any program that aims to involve linguistic support in the home, the actions and inactions of parents must be considered.

Unfortunately, among the professionals who work with Alaska Natives there is widespread ignorance about contemporary socialization strategies, which are seen as non-existent or maladaptive (Sprott, 1992). Unlike outside professionals, of course, community members and those closely tied to community life will know firsthand the attitudes of young parents; they will hopefully take a critical and explicit evaluation of the significance of these attitudes so as to better inform language policy.

As living conditions shift, and family demands change, parents respond to the challenges of raising children based on the values and methods they have been equipped with from their own upbringing. Fundamental changes in these practices occur slowly (Sprott, 1992; 2), although traditional values may take new forms and the important roles in children's lives will be re-assessed and determined. Native societies are changing in a number of ways, including growing urbanization. Although current data is hard to find, there was an increase from 16% to 31% of Alaska Natives living in urban areas between 1960 and 1980 (Sprott 1992; 2) The full significance of this on the continuity of cultural transmission can only be determined by looking at the ways Native parents in urban areas keep connections with more concentrated communities and older generations.

An exciting indication of strong cultural continuity is the repeated affirmation in Sprott's study (1992) that a grandparent will play a highly active and informative role in a child's life. Traditionally, in Ahtna society "grandparents and grandchildren are free and affectionate in their relations" (de Laguna, McClellan, 653). Katherine Wade, an active and respected elder in Chickaloon, remembers that her grandparents "were so

important in [her] life” and taught her “to know right from wrong” (Wade, 2004; 1). Furthermore, children’s actions reflect upon their grandparents; Wade notes that a child’s foolish behavior would make fools of their grandparents (Wade, 2004; 4). Additionally, from “strongest ally,” “warmest relationship,” and “role model for altruism,” many young Alaskan Native parents from various cultural groups in Anchorage acknowledge the importance of their grandparents when they themselves were children (Spratt, 1992; 22). For the new generation, many of the study’s participants lived with their own parents for periods following the births of their children, who are cared for by this grandparent (Spratt, 1992; 49). These relationships are not uncomplicated, as young parents try to assert their independence or break cycles of alcoholism and abuse, but even if the intergenerational ties have been broken on one side of the family, there is usually a close older figure from the other side (Spratt 1992).

Many Native parents in Anchorage see either their parents or their partner’s parents at least once a week (Spratt, 1992; 47). Most participants in one study both fostered ties with the older generations, despite their frustration at either too indulgent or too strict attitudes towards their children from these grandparents and surrogate grandparents (Spratt 1992; 55). While instilling a sense of ethnic identity in their children is a priority for parents, there are many intercultural couples raising children today (Spratt 1992). In these relationships, the common language is clearly English and it will be hard for couples to clearly commit to transmitting multiple languages to their children. However, where immersion and bilingual schooling does exist, many attending students come from intercultural families who have made the choice to strongly support all cultural programs for their children. For example, a student may attend Ya Ne Dah Ah

school in Chickaloon during the school year, but spend summers in Yup'ik culture camp with another side of the family (personal communication).

It is clear that cultural continuity and socialization are priorities for contemporary Native parents in urban Alaska, and this attitude needs to be fostered in relation to language acquisition. As long as grandparents play a valued role, and parents are willing to encourage an environment of high linguistic exposure, these relationships can be utilized to build the child's base in language and other cultural norms.

3.2 Elders

According to Beatrice Medicine (81), "all individuals involved with Native education will benefit by effectively using elders metaphorically as bridges between two cultural domains." The importance of elders as directors of language and other cultural programs in Ahtna country is repeatedly stressed by most of those who are working in the field (personal communication). Not only do the elders provide critiques and guidance, their support is ultimately required for legitimization of the authority of the project.

Discussing the situation in Canada, Beatrice Medicine cautions programs to do more than just pay lip-service to the advice of elders (74), who may be only peripherally included, or even ignored. When asked to be on an elder committee, one Blackfoot woman commented "what is the role of elders? Are we taken off the shelf just to give the opening prayer at some meeting?" (as quoted in Medicine, 77).

The Sacred Circle Project in Edmonton (in Medicine, 78) defines eldership as not merely any older person, but one who has accumulated "a great deal of wisdom and knowledge... especially of culture or tradition." While the specifics will vary between

tribes, elders from a variety of groups including Blackfoot, Cree, and Northern Athabaskan stress that learning from elders can only effectively occur with knowledge of the pedagogy they employ (personal communication and Medicine, 2001; 79, 80). For example, learners may be encouraged not to ask questions but rather repeat a lesson until the answer comes to them, thereby developing a full understanding of all facets involved in the issue (Medicine, 2001; 79). Without understanding how the learning situation is structured, unintentional rudeness and discourtesy from students can discourage elders from continued participation.

Young people also provide direction and energy for elders. As Agnes Vera recounts, her interest in her language was rekindled by the persistence of her son (Vera, 1998). The book How to Keep Your Language Alive (Hinton et al., 2002) repeatedly stresses that the commitment and action to adult learning of a language is the responsibility of the learner. The teaching of children is, clearly, the responsibility of the community as a whole, and adult learners can act as a medium, teaching children what they learn from the elders.

4.0 Theory

Here I will present various relevant theoretical models for discussing and understanding situations of language shift. I assume my readers to have a fair amount of knowledge of the literature, and intimate exposure to the realities faced by endangered language speech communities. I will only briefly cover causes and stages of the transition of a community moving from predominately using a certain language (or languages) to predominately using another. I will focus instead on theories of what kinds of

preservation and documentation work are the least damaging, what it means to be a truly integrated and multilingual society, and how action can be undertaken responsibly and resourcefully.⁴

4.1 Orality and Literacy

Much linguistic documentation of a language and production of educational materials is based on the assumptions of literacy. While language in non-literate traditions only exists in the presence of a speaker, archivization and documentation is clearly based on recording linguistic information that can be accessed while not in the presence of a speaker. Development of a new orthography focuses on the sounds of speech as isolatable units, dictionaries focus on words as isolatable units, and folklore collections may focus on stories as isolatable units. This may be very useful, but it is important to keep such actions as closely aligned as possible with the references and values of the speech community.

Scollon and Scollon (1995) critique the use of the term ‘orality’ arguing that it stems from a highly literacy-influenced understanding of language. They argue that the

⁴ Unfortunately, throughout this section, much of my use of terms and concepts remains relatively unexamined. Obviously, complex issues require careful and exact consideration, and I will attempt to explain my biases and motivations here. Of particular concern is the almost interchangeable use of ‘communication,’ ‘language,’ and ‘culture.’ While I certainly do not think these are equivalent, my primary concern for language is not structural, but rather its communicative use, so when I examine patterns of communication it is for the purpose of further understanding the role of language in context. Also, although I support a variety of efforts for people’s self-determination, my interest and training is in linguistics and in this paper when I refer to culture and multiculturalism, it is primarily in the interest of how these affect language. As a linguist using the term ‘speech community,’ I clearly support the notion that language is useful in defining groups of people, but I would not go so far as to claim that language is the most important or defining aspect of any culture, as that would deny people’s cultural affiliations which are extra-linguistic. The most extreme example of this type of thinking is perhaps the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis which states that culture is a product of language, and is used by language as a means of self-propagation. I think that whether or not this is the case is irrelevant, as my allegiance is not to abstract entities such as language but rather to the people who use them, and those peoples’ increased control over their lives, and such is my interest here.

phonocentrism of an alphabetically literate society has led to the view that communication and language are primarily defined by sound. Ironically, this has led to the assertion that the main difference between ‘literate’ and ‘oral’ cultures is the primacy of the visual in literacy and of the aural in ‘orality’ (1995; 24). However, since an alphabet is really just visually encoded phonetic information (among other things), it is clear that defining language in terms of its phonetic output has nothing to do with ‘orality’ at all, or even with the most important communicative aspects of a ‘speech’ event. They suggest that in ‘oral’ communication, the communication is really multi-modal, involving input from all bodily senses and culturally specific context. As Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1995; 92) point out, research in an ‘oral’ society always involves “bothering someone,” unlike research in an archive or library. For scholars in a literate tradition, the more the information is disembodied, ‘biblified,’ the more comfortable and trustworthy it is. However, for scholars in an oral tradition, the more disembodied and biblified the information, the more discomfort increases.

Responding to the inadequacy of the term ‘orality,’ Scollon and Scollon (1995; 27) propose the term ‘somatic communication,’ to reflect the fully embodied and multisensory elements of some types of what linguists classically characterize as ‘speech’ events.⁵ A revitalization program which relies too heavily on schools or literacy may not help revitalize the language at all, but rather recast it through the aesthetics and cultural assumptions associated with highly mediated communication. Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1995; 97) warn that school, the “epitome of institutionalized literate aesthetics,” can, as a medium of informational transfer, reshape Native cultural content until it is so “detached and transformed that it is no longer recognizable as Native [by

⁵ ‘Soma’ is the Greek word for body.

tradition bearers].” In the famous aphorism of Marshall McLuhan, the medium is the message. In order to utilize the powerful mechanics of schooling in the interest of a Native language or culture, classrooms and curricula will have to be imaginatively designed to reflect both cultural content and form.

The heavy focus on literacy in the schools and society has been critiqued since at least the early 20th century by educators such as Luther Standing Bear, who calls for not only bilingual education and Native teachers, but also for Native language preservation (1933). In a prescient articulation of what is now widely recognized by linguists and activists, he warns that “a language unused, embalmed, and reposing only in a book, is a dead language. Only the people themselves, and never the scholars, can nourish it into life” (Standing Bear, 1933; 234). Further, in his recognition of the validity of oral cultures, he explains that “stories were the libraries of our people” (Standing Bear 1933; 27).

The AICLS mentoring program seeks to address the issue. Leanne Hinton opens her book with a series of myths about language learning, including the supposed necessity of written materials (Hinton et al., 2002; 1). Unrelentingly practical, this program recognizes that the immediacy of an interactive situation allows for embodied communication such as gestures and facial expressions to support language learning. Importantly, however, this is not seen as extra-linguistic, but rather as another component to fully knowing the language. “In Karuk, for example, ... one points with the whole hand, palm up. In Havasupai, one doesn’t use one’s hand at all, but points with pursed lips instead” (Hinton et al., 2002; 13).

Nora Marks and Richard Dauenhauer (1995) describe the process of language becoming disembodied in the recording of Tlingit oral literature. Moving from the assumption that a living culture, and its works, is a process, something that *happens*, they describe the reduction of works of oral literature into things which *are*, objective products contemplated independent of functional meaning.

Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer, two language scholars, one a Native speaker of Tlingit and the other with academic training in European languages and literatures (1998; 57), follow the critiques of Tlingit oral tradition bearers in their insistence on presenting oral literature not as children's literature (1995; 98), not in only English (1995; 100), and not as a story independent of narrative frame (1995; 92). While children did listen to this literature, it was because they participated in adult society and matured into it. Literature was continually reinterpreted throughout one's life (1995; 98). Importantly, they retain the whole of the 'narrative frame,' in which storytellers justify access to material under clan ownership through kinship ties and life experience (1995; 93). While in the past anthologies have rarely recognized the importance of such 'oral copyright,' these keep the stories from existing in a non-authorial isolation from cultural references. The Dauenhauers' achievement is significant, because it provides a guide for those seeking to record oral literature in writing while following the guidelines of tradition bearers. At the same time, they recognize the inherent limitations to such preservation. Like petrified wood, the preserved form is not the thing itself, but rather a magnificent yet dead image of a tradition (1995; 102).

Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1995; 97) seem to suggest that the (non)vitality of a culture can be at least partially determined by the degree of its objectification. When 'the

Culture' is primarily understood as an entity to be possessed or not, to be looked at, archived, displayed, written, then it is clear that its relevance as a system of processes for negotiating and defining communal life is in serious decline. The same is true for language. The structures of culture and language are not uniformly and equally shared by all members of a given society (Dauenhauer, Dauenhauer, 1995; 102), but rather exist as the relationship between those members.

4.2 Integrated Society

In similar conception of integration, Tove Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) describes how, in discourses about immigrants and minorities, 'integrated' is often used as a euphemism for a state of assimilation to the dominant culture to the deficit of the transfer of non-dominant cultural values, norms, and practices. In her re-conception of the term, however, integration is not the exclusive responsibility of non-dominant groups, is not a telic process, and does not require the substitution of a foreign culture for one's heritage (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000).

The education and socialization of all members of a society must include the development of cultural competencies which will help integration occur, and allow the choice to maintain ethnic and national distinctiveness, especially, in her interests and those of this paper, a minority language. Minimally, this means that multilingual/multicultural educational programs will give students the tools to cognitively and behaviorally function in a culture different from that of one's origin (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; 116).

One feature of integration is the development of metalinguistic awareness (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; 121). Obviously, when a country like the United States has around 155 spoken Native languages today (Kraus 1998; 11), no one will be competent with all of them. Not even all members of a Native group should be expected to know their heritage language (Dauenhauer, Dauenhauer, 1998; 98). However, exposure to and immersion in a foreign language can be used to understand how one's basic assumptions about cognition and social interaction are culturally based. With an understanding of the distinctness and relativity of one's own culture and language, one can better engage in the processes of true integration (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; 123). When integration is understood as a process by which members of different cultural groups gain a high level of mutual cultural competency, that is knowledge of each other's language, identities, values, and behaviors, then groups are empowered to maintain and develop national identity and language in both private and public spaces in response to the changing demands of contemporary society (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000).

Not only would a society be more equitable if supporting linguistic diversity, clearly the necessary steps towards sustaining (or, rather, not eliminating) diverse speech communities will support work for justice in other areas, such as in education and political self-determination. It has even been suggested that adequate support of endangered languages would entail and inform more sustainable economic development models, in terms of increased local control, stable and diverse ecosystems, and respect for traditional knowledge (Nettle, Romaine, 2000).

4.3 Media

An area which needs to be more thoroughly explored is the use of mass media in the service of endangered language communities. While most materials are currently produced in some written form requiring literacy (or, more recently, computerized materials), radio, especially, is a cheap and far reaching medium that only requires expertise in the oral aspects of language. Since writers such as Krauss (1980; 82) have anxiously predicted that the proliferation of young childhood exposure to television will be such a strong enculturating force as to rapidly weaken even strong languages, one would hope that perhaps this force could be redirected, but it seems strangely absent from most literature on endangered languages.

In Bethel, on the Kuskokwim delta, a community radio station has been broadcasting Yup'ik content for 30 years (Daley, James, 2004). Although it has been recently increasingly controlled by whites, originally KYUK broadcast stories, songs, and translations of the news in Central Yup'ik and inspired sister stations, such as KOTZ of Kotzebue (Daley, James, 2004; 153). Bethel also launched a community television station, which has broadcast video documentaries monolingually in Yup'ik and a two hour talent show hosted by a Yup'ik speaker, among other programming (Daley, James, 2004; 170). Although few other Alaska Native groups have made use of these technologies, they are certainly available, and could be used to broadcast a variety of culturally enriching programming, even multi-lingually.

5.0 Peter Kalifornsky

Peter Kalifornsky was a respected elder and speaker of the Dena'ina language. By the early seventies, he was one of only three or four speakers of the Kenai dialect of the

Dena'ina language (Boraas, 1991; 479) He was instrumental in helping recall song fragments and ceremonial details during cultural revival movements in the 70s, and this is also when he began producing his writings (ibid.). As reported by Boraas, his recollection of the stories, history, songs, and word definitions was an arduous task, considering that Kalifornsky had not heard some of these for upward of 50 years (Boraas, 1991; 480). As a writer he was both chronicler and innovator, recording historical accounts and works of oral literature, and developing a sub-genre of explanatory stories which tie ends together and comment on cultural significance of other works. He also innovated an inter-linear style of bilingual writing (Kari, 1991; xxviii), which parallels Dena'ina writing with English glosses to make the linguistic structures very clear to English speakers. A similar style is conventional in academic linguistics. He was an author and a scholar whose significant contribution is recognized both in Alaska and across Native American literature.

Ahtna and Dena'ina are closely related, and consider each other relatives (de Laguna, McClellan, 1981; 641). There has been frequent intermarriage, and although the languages may be considered distinct by some experts, Ahtna speakers are likely to attend Dena'ina language workshops, highlighting the arbitrary nature of the language and dialect distinction. Marcl Pete, an Ahtna elder, and Sondra Stuart, a teacher in Chickaloon, both participated in a week long intensive Dena'ina workshop in summer 2004, where they simply spoke and provided examples in their 'dialect' (personal communication).

5.1 Stories

Kalifornsky is important to understanding the direction a culturally aligned language program must take because although he worked with linguists frequently enough to learn their methods and concerns, he continued to represent a Dena'ina worldview. In a poem on education, Kalifornsky three times mentions language and linguistic activity: "They should know all of the language and the skills/ They should be aware of the old people and retain their language work/ They should learn without writing....study the words, the remaining words" (Kalifornsky, 1991; 7). Further, he says to study the songs and place names (*ibid.*). This is a very straightforward and action-oriented layout of curriculum goals and methods. If heeded, Kalifornsky has provided a robust model which emphasizes Native priorities in the structure of an educational program. Of particular note is his mention of oral-based language learning, which points to the importance of this type pedagogy in Dena'ina culture. Kalifornsky, a prolific writer, obviously recognizes the value of the written form as a non-synchronous medium of communication. He states "now that the Dena'ina language is written well, the Dena'ina language will be preserved" (1991; 203). Nonetheless, he does not sacrifice oral forms in his adoption of literacy, and states that in a curriculum, literacy should be neither the ultimate goal nor writing the preferred method of informational transfer. The advice of elders such as Kalifornsky should be central in the design of any program which aims to align itself with the priorities of the traditional cultural context.

In the Dena'ina cosmology, language is dangerous and, to some degree, illocutionary. In the old Dena'ina beliefs, the prophet is "one whose words come true" and he is isolated from the village so his words don't have unintended consequences (Kalifornsky, 1991; 15). The theme of words coming true is powerful and runs through

many stories, for both good and evil, and sometimes unexpectedly. Language use must be guarded and appropriate, because language itself creates, defines, and changes the world it describes.

In addition, speech has its proper place. In a story, one boy forces his dog to learn to talk, saying “This is your tongue, it is for talking,” and biting the dog’s ear. This seems to emphasize the oral/aural mode of language, and that reception and production are equally important. The dog replies that, although he will do whatever the boy tells him to, he is an animal “I am not made to talk.” Following this, the boy keels over and dies, by cause of his words; “his own words went back against him” (Kalifornsky, 1991; 185). Knowledge of speech’s proper role and place is essential, and undermining its traditional context can have unintended consequences. In this story, forced speech is an act of violence, and ultimately unproductive. It is speech which defines the domain of the human, and although an animal like a dog has the power to make choices- when it follows the boy into the human domain- there are disastrous results when it talks. Not only do these examples underscore the power of language and society, and thus the importance of revitalization programs, they also show that without an understanding of the full cultural context, the language could be, at worst, deadly and dangerous. Care and precision should be exercised when choosing what to say and when to speak, under the guidance of knowledgeable elders.

5.2 Language Lessons

In his collected writings, Peter Kalifornsky lays out a series of language lessons and explorations of the Kenai people’s language patterns. His lessons mostly fall into

three categories. The first are lessons about practical usage of the language. These show the underlying structure of Dena'ina by the ways they express familiar texts from English and Russian. Included are translations of religious texts and hymns, patriotic texts such as the pledge of allegiance, and useful lists such as names for holidays and months, terms related to employment (ambitious, diploma, obligation...), and urban structure (cafeteria, gas station, council room, Indian action program office...) (Kalifornsky, 1991; 414-431). Regular use of the language which is included in these lessons will provide a contemporary setting for the everyday use of the language. Also, because of the use of classifiers, roots, and other segments, these word lists simultaneously teach the learner about Dena'ina verbal structure and deverbal nominalization, by providing examples of complex constructions such as: papers-in-between-they-lay (library), meat-ground-where-they-fry (snack bar), and even-for-words-they-sit (congressmen) (ibid.).

The next set is more abstract, and related to language structures and patterns. There are word lists grouped by initial or final sound, and charts of verb inflection and conjugation, with incorporated classifiers and objects (Kalifornsky, 1991; 432-448). While these may be long, difficult, and tedious to study, they will help a language learner by limiting the variables encountered in narratives or more natural speech. In the "dancing" series (Kalifornsky, 1991; 444), many possible combinations are systematically explored of types of dances, who is dancing, and whether they dance alone or together. Focusing on one pattern of the language can reveal its rules, and make it applicable elsewhere. Many second-language curricula are based on this type of model, for what it's worth, in high schools and other places, and for someone who has studied languages in these settings, similarity can make a curriculum familiar and (perhaps)

accessible. It is important to remember, however, that the intricacies of different languages lie in different places, and the curricula used for one probably should not be adapted for another. A 1983 Koyukon grammar keeps most transitive verbs and negative sentences for the intermediate and advanced levels, observing that while these sentence types may be simple in some languages, they would be extraordinarily difficult for a beginning learner of Koyukon.

The third set is made up of explorations of language, and language play. He writes out jokes, linguistically based poems, and coins new words. This demonstrates Kalifornsky's deft use of the language, and points to its productive and creative potential, encouraging new users to learn the language as a living system, not as a fully codified and unproductive set of obsolete words. This also provides space for meta-linguistic discourse and consideration, where Kalifornsky begins to propose theories for cognition the nature of thought: "The brain is different [from the mind]./ Our body and brain come together [to make the mind]./ Through our senses, we become totally aware./ The world is represented in our mind and becomes part of us./ And we imagine" (Kalifornsky, 1991; 457).

Kalifornsky importantly engaged in critical self-documentation, recording the oral literature and history of the Kenai Dena'ina. More, he showed by the creation of new genres and words like "surfer: the one sliding on waves" (Kalifornsky, 1991; 391) and "linguists: those who dwell at the base of the word" (Kalifornsky, 1991; 393) that Dena'ina is not static or antiquated, but fully applicable to the situations encountered by the people who speak it. Kalifornsky is saddened by the decline of the language, but insists on active responsibility of the speech community. "No one has persuaded hem

away from their own laws. As one people, with the various chiefs, they agreed on what was best.” (Kalifornsky, 1991; 203)

6.0 Shem Pete

Shem Pete was a Dena’ina man from the territory of the Upper Cook Inlet. He was a proficient speaker of Dena’ina, Ahtna, English, and Russian (Kari, Fall, et al., 2003; 21, 289) and was widely respected for his master storytelling and knowledge of songs. In this capacity he helped to establish the Tyonek Singers and Dancers, was frequently invited to the University of Alaska at Fairbanks, and was eulogized by the Alaska State Legislature in a statement following his death entitled “In Memoriam, Shem Pete” (Kari, Fall, et al. 2003; 4-5). Furthermore, as an expert geographer he has left a wealth of knowledge in the form of the book Shem Pete’s Alaska, by James Kari and James A. Fall: a collection of place names that provide a frame of reference for Dena’ina history and culture. He had a personal knowledge of the Upper Cook Inlet, having lived and traveled extensively through the area. The total territory of the Upper Inlet Dena’ina is about 25,000 square miles, and Shem Pete traveled by foot or boat through an area of more than 13,800 of those square miles (Kari, Fall, et al., 2003; 30).

Historically, in Dena’ina culture, place names and other inventories are archived in memory. Without reference to maps or other external physical recordings, these lists form a numerically large subset of the Dena’ina lexicon. According to Kari (2003; 31), because the structure of a place name is analyzable linguistically, a sequence of names is a “stimulating mix of fact and imagery, ... [which] can be enjoyed as folk poetry.” Many places have a single root name which is common to multiple Athabaskan languages, but

which regularly varies in pronunciation according to each one's phonology. This suggests that place names underwent similar changes as other lexical roots in the process of language individuation, and strongly indicates the antiquity of these names (Kari, 2003; 33). The fact that among speakers there is almost universal agreement about place names, and that the system is very resistant to change⁶ indicates that place names and encyclopedic geographic knowledge form an important part of the knowledge base transmitted with the language (Kari, 2003; 31).

Athabaskan place names are a detailed native classificatory system, applied systematically over a region or watershed basin (Kari, 2003; 31). In Kari's analysis (2003; 35), he shows that Dena'ina names are regularly formed with a binomial structure: a *specific term*, usually a descriptive noun or verb, and a *generic term*, which refers to the type of topographic feature referenced or spatial delineation of the location. Generic terms are structured variously with a verb + enclitics, noun + pp (at something, under somewhere), or other noun roots (lake, stream, etc.) (ibid.). The grammatical regularity of this formation allows especially the generic terms to be linguistically enlightening when the parts are understood, and are good practice for learning certain constructions.

The specific names are chosen based on the physical and utilitarian properties of a location, and "reveal a great deal about environmental interests and cultural values" (Kari, 2003; 40). Only rarely are places described in relation to an individual person or historical event. For example, **nik'uhhay niljenghiyut**, 'where Nikolai went through the pass,' is one of the only Dena'ina place names that is based on a personal name (Kari,

⁶ Interestingly, of around 60 Dena'ina place names recorded before 1845, all but about 5 were known to Shem Pete (Kari, 2003; 31). The stability of these names across generations shows their high significance to speakers, and makes a powerful statement about the ruptures that language shift causes in cultural continuity.

Fall, et al., 2003; 139). Of the 973 names listed in the second edition of Shem Pete's Alaska, only about 3% are based on people or historic/mythic events (Kari, Fall, et al., 2003; 40). Instead, names are a system for encoding relevant information, often related to ecology and resource management, such as the Ahtna name **ts'ec tac'ilaexde**, 'where fish run among the rocks' (Kari, Fall, et al., 2003; 297). Together, these names create a clear picture of traditional food production and storage, and the interactions involved in human or animal land usage. Another Ahtna name, **tsiis t'el'iixden**, 'where ochre is gathered' (Kari, Fall, et al., 2003; 304), is important in reference to the stories of clan origin, and key for understanding traditional social structure identity.

Geographical classificatory stems delineate Northern Athabaskan languages. Kari (2003; 37) has grouped the languages according to hydronymic boundaries. There are seven mutually exclusive stems that can be used to mean 'stream' which mark distinct boundaries among Northern Athabaskan groups (ibid.). These divisions closely tie language and geography and provide clues as to the geopolitical movements of ancient Athabaskan peoples, both on the land and in relation to each other. The Ahtna and Dena'ina utilize very similar toponymic generic stems in their place names (Kari, 2003; 38). Because of the closeness of their toponymic stems, the high incidence of Ahtna-origin place names in the Upper Inlet territory (around 15-16%, or 154 of 973) (Kari, 2003; 37), and close associations across the Ahtna/Dena'ina language boundary (Kari, Fall, et al., 2003; 289), conclusions drawn from Shem Pete's book should be considered when designing language curricula in either Dena'ina or Ahtna communities.

It has been suggested that Native American history is primarily conceived in space rather than time (Deloria, 1973), and according to Gail Valaskakis (1996;154), the

physical environment is more salient and active in the narratives of Native Americans. Analyzing prominent Native thinkers and writers, Valaskakis (1996;166) concludes that “Indian discourses of the land affirm that space is cognitively and politically marked,” and she further quotes Matthew Coon-Come, Grand Chief of the James Bay Cree, who says that “our land is our memory.” Clearly, when the Ahtna refer to **nekets’alyaexden**, ‘where we turn around’ (Kari, Fall, et al., 2003; 309), they are remembering. This pass doesn’t mark the furthest extent of travel, but rather the last vantage point from which Copper River country can be seen. They turned around here to scatter soil which they brought for this purpose from their homes and pray for a safe journey (Kari, Fall, et al., 2003; 309). This highlights the intersection of the land and language defining cultural meaning.

7.0 Revitalization Efforts

The Ya Ne Dah Ah: Ancient Teachings school founded by Katherine Wade in the village of Chickaloon has been running since 1992 and is beginning to graduate young people with a high level of exposure to and understanding of Ahtna language and Athabaskan culture and heritage (personal communication). By working closely with elders and other community members, they teach Ahtna Athabaskan history, language, music, and art as well as conventional subjects. While according to the National Congress of American Indians, only 50% of Indian students finish high school (2004), at Chickaloon drop out has simply not materialized as an issue, and they have demonstrated test scores above national counterparts in science, math, English, and social studies (Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, 2002). Their success has

been recognized by the awarding of high honors from the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development: Honoring Nations. They create entirely their own curriculum and teaching materials, including a new set of language CDs, which they're beginning to share as other communities see their success and look into opening similar schools (personal communication).

The strengths of this school are many. As a project involving the whole community, it sends an unequivocal message of support to its students. Further, culture and language learning happen in the morning, other subjects come in the afternoon. This primary position in the day, when students' minds are most active and before other classes can run late, clearly positions Ahtna language's importance against other subjects. Closely working with elders and written materials means that students receive correct linguistic structures, even though the teacher Sondra Stuart is still in the process of learning the language. Perhaps unexpectedly, the school's position as a trailblazer and success story gives its graduates a prestige that affords them unique opportunities. Graduates have been invited to a colloquium at Harvard, to the opening of the Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian, and other nationally recognized events.

Although this school does use written materials, it is clear that the students are learning phonological processes independent of orthographic conventions. For example, some initial consonants become devoiced when a possessive prefix is added to a noun. When asked, one student produced the correct form, but then spelled the word with the voiced letter because he knew the root noun was spelled with that letter. Following this, he mispronounced the possessed word with a voiced consonant. This sort of mis-mapping

is a danger to be carefully addressed when teaching children in a language for which they do not receive constant linguistic input.

Similarly, children at a culture camp in Gulkana spent an afternoon learning to count from one elder. While they were making progress toward being able to produce the sounds correctly, someone brought a language poster that had been produced locally. The words in Ahtna were written correctly, but each number was also labeled with an English pronunciation 'guide' for those who are illiterate in Ahtna. These guides showed incorrect pronunciations and the children, already somewhat literate in English, quickly accepted those forms as standard stopped hearing the distinct sounds in the elder's speech, losing the progress they had been making. If written materials are to be used, all caution should be taken that they are as correct as possible and do not mislead students.

This camp was held for a few days while elders and youth gathered to cut and dry salmon, hold language lessons, and cook and eat together. This sort of event is essential for grounding the language in its cultural context, while simultaneously transmitting knowledge about many important aspects of life and communal living. Busy schedules kept the event short, unfortunately, and while it was well organized, there was poor attendance by the local youth.

It becomes obvious in these situations that language is not something held uniformly by all speakers, but must exist as the relationship between them. This is why Leanne Hinton (2002) stresses the importance of apprentices speaking only the Native language to the mentor, because, however imperfect the beginner's speech, the minimal input and response will rapidly expand what the expert speaker remembers of the language, especially if they haven't used it for some time. For example, at the camp in

Gulkana, when Roy Ewan presented on hunting, he knew many Native concepts but not the words. He asked other elders questions like “how do you say that thing which is like being tired but is satisfaction after a hard day of trekking and working, perhaps with little food?” A more proficient speaker always knew exactly the one word or phrase that Ewan was referencing, and the interaction brought out vocabulary that might be otherwise only rarely elicited.

Sondra Stuart, the teacher at Yah Ne Dah Ah School, is learning Ahtna following a mentoring program similar to the one outlined by Leanne Hinton (2002), but with input from the ANLC. At first she started working with Katherine Wade, but the close kinship ties and living proximately got in the way. Although relatives can make for a highly successful collaborative team, especially when children have taken an interest in the language their parents never taught them (Vera, 1998; 80), at other times it can create a critical pressure where the speaker holds the learner to an ideal standard and has little patience for their mistakes. Sondra is now working with another capable elder who unfortunately lives more than two hours away, which severely limits the frequency of time spent in immersive language exposure.

8.0 Conclusion

Native communities see that sophistication in speaking a language like English increases access to educational, economic, and political institutions of power, while sophistication in speaking one’s heritage language can provide an important spiritual and cognitive link to the intellectual traditions of one’s people. The language is important not only in a stagnant archival form, perhaps which could be used in ritual religious practice,

but also as a living and adaptive strategy for social interaction and cultural development. While the difficult decisions of how to allot limited time, labor, and resources must be made within each community, outsiders such as linguists must be available if called upon to provide specialized advice, recommendations, or advocacy to policy makers.

However, just as the phonology and syntax of every language is unique, so are the rules governing how language is used and why, and they must be considered as part of the revitalization program. Preserving cultural frames and references as accurately as possible in the recorded forms will allow a language to be accessed relatively independently of dominant aesthetics, values, and priorities. Further, those members of a dominating culture who are working in multicultural situations must be prepared, through examination of others' traditional intellectual works and development of metalinguistic and metacultural awareness, to be equally responsible for integration and learning of new cultural competencies, which will allow their work to be more helpful and relevant to the local community.

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